

HOW TO... Type faster

If you're all fingers and thumbs at the keyboard, TypingMaster will help get your typing up to speed, says Helen Morrison

Is your typing prowess limited to staring at the keyboard until you find the letter you want, hitting it, then searching for the next letter? Or do you have a few basic typing skills but need to keep an eye on the keyboard to prevent gibberish appearing onscreen? Being confident at typing makes using a PC easier, and while most of us don't need to learn to touch-type, being reasonably familiar with the layout of the keyboard is a must.

If a little brushing up is all you're after, there's no need to buy a typing tutorial program. TypingMaster Typing Test is a free program that provides games and tests to help you improve your typing speed. You can download a copy from www.typingmaster.com/individuals/typingtest.asp. You will be prompted to buy TypingMaster Pro at every turn, but this is the downside of a freebie. If you can ignore it, this immensely helpful program will help you pick up the pace in no time.

1 The program's games are a great place to start if you lack confidence with the keyboard, or if you just want to have some fun. Click on the Warm Up Games link on the right-hand side of the TypingMaster screen. Let's start with Clouds. We'll begin with the Studied Keys option, which is helpful if you're using the touch-typing position (left hand on the A, S, D and F keys, and right hand on the J, K, L and ; keys). Click on Start Clouds.

2 Read the instructions, then click on Next. In this game, clouds float past. They're not all white and fluffy. Some are dark with a lighting symbol on them

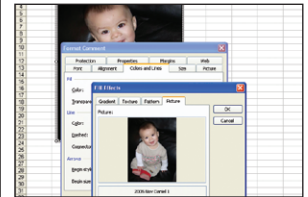
while others have a sun symbol. You need to move to the clouds with symbols by pressing the Space bar. When the red outline is around the cloud, type in the letters you see underneath it, then press the Space bar again. If you get it right, the cloud disappears. The game ends if you miss six clouds.

3 Once you've warmed up, have a go at one of the typing tests. Click on that option in the menu on the right-hand side. By default, all the typing tests are set to 10 minutes. You type as much of the document onscreen as you can in the allotted time. This can be changed if you wish by clicking on the drop-down menu. It is possible to use your own text files for the typing tests. Click on Add and navigate to the document in the dialog box that appears. Alternatively, choose from one of the preset tests in the list. Once you've decided, click Next.

4 The text you're to copy is displayed at the top and your typing will appear beneath. TypingMaster will underline the word you are currently typing. If you make a mistake while typing a word, hit backspace to go back and correct it. Once you've hit the Space bar, though, the program won't allow you to go back. Mistakes in your copy will be highlighted with a thick underline. Once you've finished, a report will appear letting you know how many words per minute you managed, how accurate your typing was and what level you are at. There are plenty of tests you can practise with, from Aesop's Fables to the history of photography, so you can learn as you type. **5**

HOW TO... Use photos in Excel comments

If you want a picture to pop up when you hover over a cell, it's easy to do in Excel. Right-click on a cell and select Insert Comment. Delete the text and move the cursor over the dotted border. When it turns into four-headed arrow, right-click and select Format Comment. On the Colors and Lines tab, click in the box next to Color. From the drop-down menu, select Fill Effects. Go to the Picture tab and click on Select Picture. Find the relevant image and click OK until you're back at the comment again.



HOW TO... Customise the pointer

There are programs that provide different sorts of pointers, but have a look at those offered by Windows. Open the Control Panel in Start. If you're in Classic View, you'll find Control Panel under Start, Settings. Double-click on the Mouse icon and go to the Pointers tab. Click in the drop-down box under Scheme to view the pointer schemes. Those with poor eyesight might appreciate the Magnified scheme.

If you like, you can blend together pointers from different schemes. To do this, highlight the pointer for the action you want to change and click Browse. Select the pointer you like in the list and click Open. To revert back, click Use Default. Click on Save As and give your new scheme a suitable name.

